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NEWS RELEASE

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**Eastern Idaho Welfare Fraud Investigation
Nets More Than \$97,000 in Repayments**

The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare's Fraud Unit conducted a week-long 'Sweeps Project' of welfare program fraud in the Idaho Falls area earlier this month, identifying more than \$97,000 to be repaid to the state because of fraud. The intensive investigation involved Food Stamps, child care assistance and Medicaid.

Five investigators from the Fraud Unit examined 54 cases of reported fraud. Of those, 19 people have admitted guilt and agreed to repay the state, while three others are being pursued for criminal prosecution. Seventeen cases remain under investigation. The remaining 15 cases were found to have no violations or are pending, due to the person being out of state, in prison, or unable to locate.

"We are conducting Sweeps Projects across the state to reduce a backlog of cases," says Lynette Porter, Fraud Unit supervisor. "In June, we conducted the same type of activity in southwest Idaho with similar positive results."

In addition to identifying \$97,273.86 which must be repaid, approximately \$589,852.00 will be saved over the next five years by preventing improper payments being made in fraudulent cases.

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Porter says the majority people who receive welfare assistance from the state are honest and genuinely need assistance. She points out that last year in the Food Stamp and Child Care programs, \$132 million was distributed in benefits, serving an average of almost 100,000 people each month. But, there will always be those who take advantage of programs that seek to help low-income people.

“We strive to protect the integrity of the programs by making sure only eligible people receive program benefits,” she says. “I don’t think anyone has a problem helping people who really need it. Our programs have limited resources, so we want to make sure the people needing assistance are the ones receiving it.”

Cases ranged from about \$700 in fraudulent payments to over \$15,000, the latter mostly involving overpayment for Medicaid. Along with having to repay the state, people who commit fraud also are disqualified from participating in most public assistance programs for a minimum of a year. In some cases, criminal charges are sought.

Porter says the Fraud Unit will continue to do ‘Sweeps Projects’ throughout the state. She encourages people who suspect welfare program fraud to contact the Fraud Unit through the toll-free fraud hotline at 1-866-635-7515. “We all can do our part to ensure the money we spend on programs designed to help low-income people is spent wisely,” she says.

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**(Editors: For more information please contact IDHW Public Information Officer
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